

INTRODUCTION

Many long-term health problems, as well as injuries, experienced by adolescents are caused by preventable behaviors. Habits formed during adolescence may lead to diseases not manifested until adulthood. Educators around the country have agreed that effective prevention programs are necessary to help reduce the extent to which young people engage in behaviors that put their health at risk. National responses have included congressional passage of the *Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1986*, the initiation by the nation's governors and the president of the *National Education Goals*, and the adoption by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services of the *Healthy People 2000: National Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Objectives*.

The same concerns about the long-term health and well being of its youth prompted Idaho's Department of Education to make drug and alcohol prevention and school safety a priority concern. As one component of its efforts, the Department has collaborated with the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) since 1996 on a study to determine the extent to which Idaho students avoid or use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. The study includes an investigation of student attitudes toward violence and safety in the schools. A statewide survey of randomly selected students has been administered five times, in 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, and 2004, providing important data that also allow the tracking of trends.

This report presents the key findings from the 2004 survey of 15,491 students from grades six, eight, ten, and twelve. Where appropriate, it makes comparisons to findings from the 1996, 1998, 2000, and 2002 surveys, as well as to national data from the University of Michigan *Monitoring the Future* study.

SAMPLING AND METHODS

The data presented in this report were collected during the 2004 replication of a survey first administered statewide in Idaho in 1996 for Idaho's State Department of Education by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

The Survey Instrument

The survey used in 2004 differed slightly from the original survey administered in 1996. The alcohol-and-other-drug-use portion of that survey was adapted from a set of questions used to assess substance use in some Idaho school districts since 1987. The *Youth Risk Behavior Survey* (YRBS, from the Center for Disease Control, 1996) provided additional questions about the school climate. Other questions about school climate were newly composed for the survey.

In 1998, the survey was altered from the 1996 version in two ways. First, one item was added preceding a series of questions about the frequency of alcohol, tobacco, and drug use. This item asked, "Do you use any of the drugs listed below?" Secondly, in the section asking about unsafe or threatening experiences, the wording was altered to clarify that the question referred to experiences that had taken place *at school*. (Question 45: "Have any of the following happened to you at school during the past 30 days?") These two changes were maintained in the 2002 version of the survey.

For the survey administered in 2002, a number of changes occurred. The option of "Other illegal stimulants" was replaced by "Ecstasy" (Question 18o). For question 19f, "Other illegal drugs" was replaced by "Ecstasy." Question 22—"If you drink, how much do you usually drink at one time?"—was deleted. Another question was added to the survey (Question 30): "How would you feel about people doing each of the following?" The options were: "a. Smoking marijuana occasionally," "b. Having one or two drinks nearly every day," "c. Having five or more drinks once or twice each weekend," "d. Attending a party in a private home where alcoholic beverages were available," and "e. Smoke one or more packs of cigarettes a day." Finally, Question 46 (in the 2000 survey)—"If you feel unsafe anywhere at school, please mark the areas and the time of the day when these places seem unsafe."—was deleted from the 2002 survey.

In all, the survey included 45 questions (many with multiple component questions) about student use of legal and illegal substances, attitudes toward the use of substances, experiences with prevention programs, risk behaviors, and school safety. Basic demographic questions were included as well. The 2004 survey was identical to the 2002 survey. A copy of the survey administered in October or November 2004 is included in Appendix A.

The first time the survey was given, only students in the sixth, eighth, and 12th grades were sampled. In 1998, a sample of 10th-grade students was surveyed as well. In 2000, ninth- and eleventh-grade students were also included in the survey for the first time. In 2002 and 2004, students in the sixth, eighth, 10th, and 12th grades were sampled.

Sampling and School Participation

Cluster sampling was employed to select a sample of approximately 625 students from each of the four grade levels within each of the six educational regions of the state. Figure 1 below represents all school districts of these six educational regions.

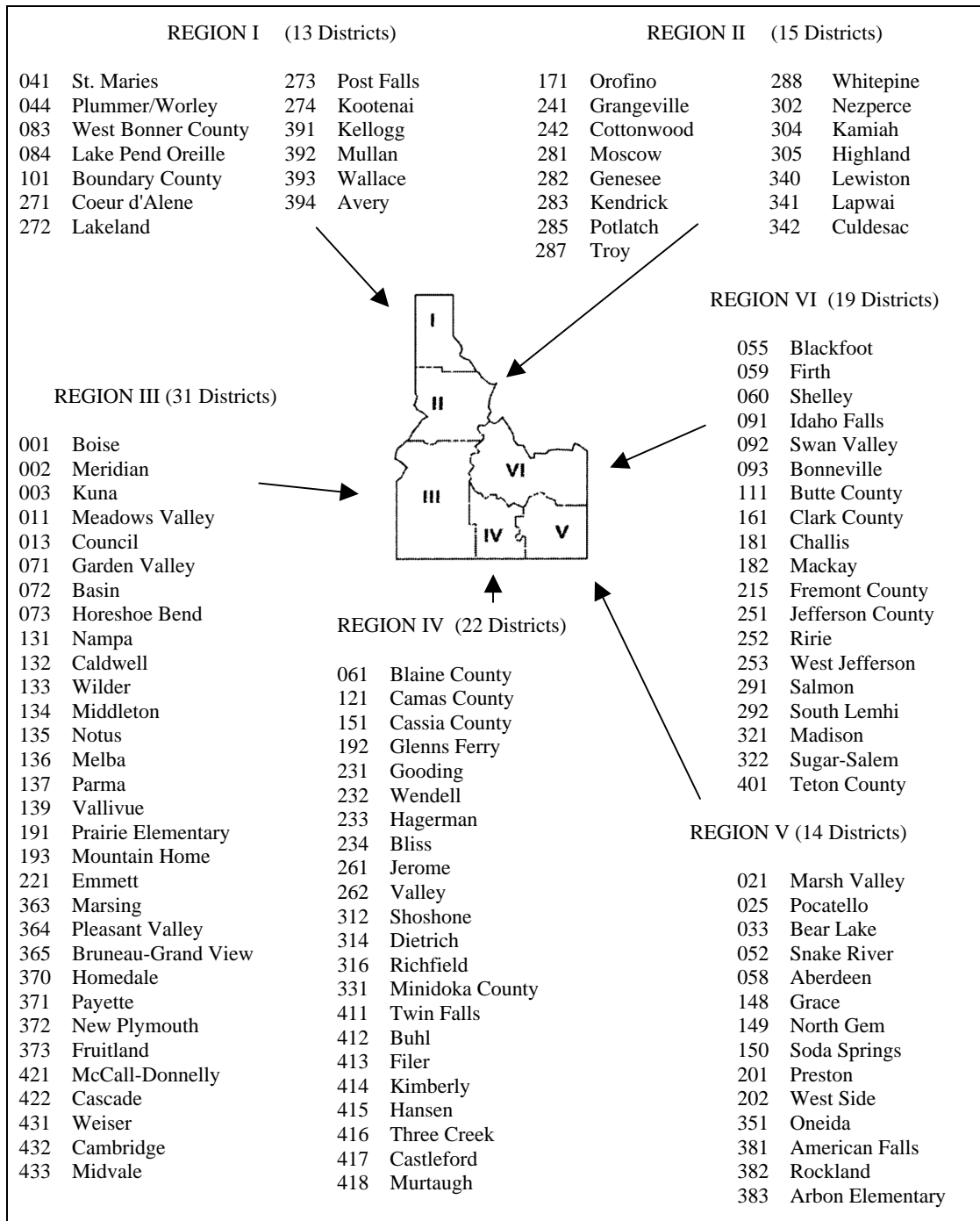


Figure 1

Within each grade and region, schools were randomly selected until a total sample size of at least 625 students was achieved. To ensure that this quota was not met by only one large school, at least three schools at each grade level in each region were included. Charter schools were included in those invited to participate. Students from two charter schools took part in the survey; the other charter schools declined.

In May of 2004, superintendents from every district in the state of Idaho received letters from NWREL explaining the survey and inviting their participation. They were informed which schools and grades, if any, in their district had been drawn as part of the random statewide sample. These students could be surveyed, if the superintendents wished, at no cost to the district. In addition, if the superintendents were interested in surveying students from other grades or schools in the district in order to gather more information about student attitudes and behavior, they could elect to add on the additional grades at a district cost of \$.50 per student. The State Department of Education agreed to subsidize the cost of add-ons and would pay the remaining balance of \$.90 per each student test.

Most superintendents responded by the end of May, but those who did not received a second mailing encouraging them to participate, or at least to indicate their unwillingness to participate. A combination of non-responses and negative responses meant that some students originally selected for the statewide sample would not be participating. At this point, additional grades and schools were randomly selected to participate. In some cases, the newly selected schools had already agreed to participate as add-ons and were simply moved over to the statewide sample.

In some instances, schools that had been selected for the statewide sample and whose district administrators had agreed to participate did not, in fact, participate in the survey. Therefore, the total number of surveyed students and/or the number of schools surveyed within some grades and regions may have dropped below the original sampling plan.

By December 2004, NWREL had received and processed 23,573 public school, alternative school and charter school student surveys, of which 15,491 were a part of the statewide sample, 7,371 were part of add-ons, and 711 surveys were not valid. A breakdown of the statewide sample by grade and region is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Final Statewide Sample Size by Grade and Region, 2004

	Region I	Region II	Region III	Region IV	Region V	Region VI	TOTAL
Grade 6	703	529	699	645	712	651	3,939
Grade 8	855	595	673	650	689	948	4,410
Grade10	621	518	640	683	582	678	3,722
Grade 12	694	491	781	394	426	634	3,420
TOTAL	2,873	2,133	2,793	2,372	2,409	2,911	15,491

Almost equal percentages of male and female students participated in the survey—7,673 boys (50.2%) and 7,624 girls (49.%). Another 194 students did not answer the gender question.

Table 3 reflects the sample size by grade and ethnicity. The overwhelming majority of surveyed students (80.7%) were Caucasian. Hispanic students made up 12.1 percent of the sample, followed by 4.7 percent Native Americans, 1.4 percent Asians, and 1.1 percent African Americans. Three hundred and sixty-one (361) students did not report their ethnicity.

Table 3
Final Statewide Sample Size by Grade and Ethnicity, 2004

		Ethnicity					TOTAL
		Asian	Hispanic	Native American	African American	Caucasian	
Grade 6	Count	46	509	297	50	2,881	3,783
	% within Grade	1.2%	13.5%	7.9%	1.3%	76.2%	100.0%
Grade 8	Count	55	551	211	49	3,455	4,321
	% within Grade	1.3%	12.8%	4.9%	1.1%	80.0%	100.0%
Grade10	Count	54	458	118	46	2,987	3,663
	% within Grade	1.5%	12.5%	3.2%	1.3%	81.5%	100.0%
Grade 12	Count	59	311	88	25	2,880	3,363
	% within Grade	1.8%	9.2%	2.6%	.7%	85.6%	100.0%
TOTAL	Count	214	1,829	714	170	12,203	15,130
	% within Grade	1.4%	12.1%	4.7%	1.1%	80.7%	100.0%

Survey Administration

From May through August 2004, NWREL communicated by letter and fax with superintendents of districts that had agreed to participate in the survey, asking them to advise principals and teachers of the upcoming survey. Throughout this period, districts finalized their approval of lists of schools and grade levels to which the survey was to be administrated.

On August 10, 2004, NWREL sent all district survey coordinators a copy of all the materials previously sent to district superintendents, describing the testing process, and including an updated list of all those schools and grade levels that had or had not been selected by their districts to be tested. This letter also served as a request for assistance in follow-up for those few district supervisors who had still not responded. By September 20, all district supervisors had responded.

On October 7, 2004, NWREL mailed out surveys and supporting materials to 92 school districts to distribute to 224 schools around the state. This gave coordinators and counselors time to organize and prepare their staff prior to the actual administration. In

addition, the supporting materials included a sample letter that school principals could use to advise parents that their students would be participating in the survey and that they had the option not to participate. The actual wording and process of notification to parents was left to the principal at each participating school. A copy of that sample letter is included in Appendix B.

Schools chose a day to administer the survey between the last two weeks of October and first week of November 2004. All schools agreed to administer the survey during those dates. All schools within a single district did not have to administer the survey on the same day. However, all grades within the same school were requested to take the survey at the same time on the same day to avoid having students who had been surveyed discuss the survey with others who had not yet taken the survey.

A copy of the instructions provided to coordinators and teachers is available in Appendix B. Essentially, the process of administering the survey was to unfold as follows: Students were allotted about 45 minutes in which to complete the survey. Teachers were instructed to distribute the surveys but not to circulate around the room while students completed them, in order to protect student confidentiality. Upon completion, students inserted their own surveys into a pre-printed envelope for that class. Once all the surveys were returned, the envelopes were immediately sealed, labeled with the teacher, grade, and school name, and returned to the school or district coordinator. The district coordinator was to mail all the envelopes, seals still intact, back to NWREL no later than November 19, 2004. No record ever existed with any identifying information on individual students at the school or district level, nor did NWREL have this information.

Data Processing and Cleaning

Once received at NWREL, completed surveys were checked in against the list of schools that had agreed to participate.

Following check-in, surveys were visually inspected for problems that might interfere with accurate computer scanning. For example, if students changed their minds about an answer and only partially erased their earlier choice, the computer might incorrectly read two answers. In such instances, the partially erased answer was fully erased. Other problems included students completing the surveys with ballpoint pens rather than pencils, or drawing over part of the survey. In those cases, new surveys were completed, with staff carefully copying in student answers.

After the surveys were machine-scanned, a second stage of cleaning occurred. At this point, the data were inspected for obviously problematic answers (grossly inconsistent responses across items, affirmative responses to a question about a fictional drug, impossibly high reports of use, etc.). This year, 3 percent of the surveys were entirely eliminated for this reason. This percentage is comparable to the percentage of excluded surveys from previous years.

Data Analysis

Data management was accomplished using Microsoft Access, Microsoft Excel, and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, weighted point estimates for population parameters, variance estimates, and other procedures for analytic comparisons and data modeling were produced using specialized software for the analysis of complex samples (SUDAAN Version 9.0: Research Triangle Institute).

Following conventions employed in the 2002 report, results were reported, including a 95 percent confidence interval, commonly called a *margin of error*. Because not all students in Idaho were surveyed, but instead only a sample, all results are only estimates of the “true” percentages that would be obtained if every student in the state were to take the survey. Because the results are estimates, there is likely to be some error, called *sampling error*, in the percentages reported in the results section of the report. Sampling error is important to keep in mind when comparing results from one year to another. For example, if the percentage of students who never smoked dropped two percentage points from 2002 to 2004, but the margin of error was ± 3 percent, we could not know if the change was due to a real change in the level of student smoking or just a difference obtained because different students happened to be in the sample this year.

For this reason, it is important to read the margin of error as well as the frequency reported for each section in the report tables. A reported result of 20 percent ± 2 percent with a 95 percent confidence interval means that for this group of students surveyed, 20 percent of them gave this answer. Furthermore, there is a 95 percent chance that the “true” answer among all students statewide is within 2 percent of 20 percent, that is, somewhere between 18 percent and 22 percent.

Throughout the report, comparisons are made to national averages. National data were obtained from the *Monitoring the Future* study, conducted by the Institute for Survey Research at the University of Michigan and available online at www.monitoringthefuture.org.